

Safe use of bed rails



Bed rails successfully prevent many falls, but their incorrect use has resulted in the deaths of bed occupants by asphyxiation through entrapment in gaps.

Risk assessment is **key** to ensure safe use. It should start with the bed occupant and include the combination of the proposed equipment, the bed and the mattress.

Issues to consider

- If the person is likely to fall from their bed, are bed rails an appropriate solution?
- Does the person's physical size or behaviour present a risk?
- Is the bed rail height appropriate for the bed occupant?
- Can the person's head, neck, chest or body become trapped between:
 - > the bars of the bed rails?
 - > other gaps created by the bed, rail, mattress and head/footboard combination?
- Is the bed rail fitted correctly – does it seem likely that it will move away from the side of the mattress or bed during use and so creating a hazard?
- Bed rails designed for adults should not be used for children.

If either the bed, mattress, bed rail or condition of the occupant changes then the risk assessment should be carried out again.

Our publication 'Safe use of bed rails' DB 2006(06) has more detailed information and is available on our website www.mhra.gov.uk
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'Third party' bed rails, as photographed below, are not model specific and fit a wide range of beds. The principles set out below apply to all types of bed rails.

Design safety

Bed rails should be fitted so that the gap between their end and the headboard is less than 60mm or greater than 250mm.

All gaps between the rail bars for adults must be 120mm or less and for children 60mm or less.



Hazards

Most of the deaths caused by bed rails could have been avoided if thorough risk assessments of the bed occupant, the bed and the bed rail combination had been carried out.

MHRA investigations have also shown that many serious and fatal incidents with bed rails have been caused by a lack of maintenance.

Bed rails must be inspected on a regular basis to ensure they are in good condition.



Things to avoid

- Gaps that could cause head, neck or chest entrapment when the mattress is compressed or between the end of the bed rail and the headboard or footboard.
- Using bed rails which are not compatible with the bed base.
- Using insecure fittings that let the bed rail drop down or move away from the side of the bed.
- Using bed rails that have not been maintained regularly.
- Bed rails with parts missing.

